

Approved For Release 25X1  
2008/11/18 :  
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130

De

Approved For Release  
2008/11/18 :  
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130

**Secret**

25X1



DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Chou En-lai: An Assessment*

**Secret**

31 January 1972  
No. 0825/72

118

**Page Denied**

SECRET

25X1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
31 January 1972

## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Chou En-lai: An Assessment

1. Chou En-lai is unquestionably the second most important man in China. Although not the officially designated heir to Mao Tse-tung (as were, in turn, Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao), he is listed just behind Mao in the official rankings of the regime. His prestige is enormous, and he appears to be viewed favorably by virtually all strata of Chinese society; those who agree in little else all seem to have "confidence" in Chou. He has reached this exalted position after decades of skillful maneuver and subtle compromise. By temperament more an administrator than a theoretician, he is a suave, urbane pragmatist who has proved his competence and durability in almost exactly 50 years of service to Chinese Communism.



2. As Premier of China, as well as the number-two man in the Communist Party, Chou has a well-defined sense of who he is and where he is going. His flexibility and capacity to control his reactions have stood him in excellent stead. These qualities have enabled him to surmount innumerable crises during a long career. Though he can adapt

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates.

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

himself to nearly any requirement of the external situation, Chou does not lack underlying principles. No matter how intense the stress, his behavior is consistent. Although he can bend with the wind, he seems never to lose sight of basic principles that reflect a clear-cut and unambiguous sense of personal identity.

25X6

-2-

SECRET

25X1

**Page Denied**

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied

SECRET

25X1

25X6

Political Role

12. Although not a founding member of the Chinese Communist Party (as is Mao), Chou has held high positions in the party and in the international Communist movement longer and more consistently than the Chairman. Chou has served on the CCP Politburo continuously longer than has Mao himself, and in fact he was instrumental in securing Mao's demotion in party ranks for infractions of discipline in the early 1930s. Mao and Chou clashed frequently on a series of issues in the period 1931-35. Chou replaced Mao as chairman of the important Military Council in 1931, but Mao took the position back after the crucial conference in 1935, which affirmed Mao's pre-eminence within the CCP. Chou, in an early demonstration of adaptability, switched sides at the decisive moment. He has worked closely with Mao ever since.

13. Over the years, however, a pattern of differences between Chou and Mao--especially as to the methods of achieving the goals of the Revolution--has been evident. Chou probably has some difficulty in fully respecting Mao in view of their strikingly dissimilar backgrounds. He probably tends to regard Mao as narrow-minded, even provincial. Nevertheless, Chou has remained the executor of Mao's ideas. His value to Mao lies in his persuasiveness and tact and his tested ability to shift from compromise to threats

-5-

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

as the forces rallied against Mao have waxed and waned. In addition, Chou has identified himself with the power of Mao's position and exhibited his unique ability to get things done. He has been able to preserve the revolution, whereas Mao, left to his own devices, might have destroyed it.

14. Since the Communists came to power in 1949, Chou has run the government bureaucracy and has acted as the principal spokesman for the People's Republic of China before the outside world. As an administrator he appears to have few peers, and his role in making the system work has probably been huge. But the government machinery in the years before the Cultural Revolution was not the principal formulator of policy; this was the function of the party leadership. Although Chou formally ranked third in the party hierarchy, his strength was not in the party machinery. Indeed there is evidence that in the late 1950s and early 1960s he was in at least occasional conflict with party general secretary Teng Hsiao-ping and heir-apparent Liu Shao-chi. Thus Chou may have had good reason to side with Mao in the initial phases of the Chairman's purge of the party machine.

15. From the founding of the People's Republic of China, Chou's special province has been foreign affairs. He acted as his own foreign minister until 1958, when the late Chen I assumed the post. Real responsibility for the formulation (and probably execution) of policy has continued to rest with Chou, however. He has frequently shown a predilection for personal diplomacy. At Geneva in 1954, at Bandung in the following year, during several international junkets--including the famous tour of Africa in 1964, at the airport meeting with Kosygin in 1969, and most recently in his discussions with Dr. Kissinger--Chou has occupied stage center and displayed the negotiating skills honed in the difficult and extremely complex talks with the Chinese Nationalists during and immediately after the second world war. Chou has assumed many attitudes toward international problems, but he has been personally most strongly identified with those periods, such as the "Bandung era" and the present moment, when Chinese foreign policy has appeared to be most flexible and "reasonable."

SECRET

25X1



SECRET

25X1

16. Chou's point of view is that of an administrator, and his desire not to have things get out of hand is clearly seen in his public statements throughout the Cultural Revolution. During this period Chou was the spokesman for the government bureaucracy, which had to try to make things work in the midst of chaos. After 1967 he also appeared to speak for the party cadres, whose top leaders had been purged in the opening phases of the "revolution." In fulfilling this role Chou vigorously and publicly defended his subordinates in the government bureaucracy--he was alone among remaining regime leaders to do this. His speeches to the Red Guards in 1966 in particular provide an interesting contrast to the inflammatory tirades of Lin Piao, just then designated as Mao's heir, as well as to such members of the infamous Cultural Revolution Group (charged with overseeing the Red Guards) as Chen Po-ta and Mao's wife, Chiang Ching.

17. Chou's attempts to curb Cultural Revolution excesses (only partly successful) undoubtedly created enmity toward him in the camp of the more radically inclined. There is strong evidence that an attempt was made to purge Chou and his immediate subordinates in the spring and summer of 1967. This was at the time efforts were being made to oust important military figures in the provinces who were responsible for maintaining order once the administrative and party machinery had broken down. An alliance between Chou and these provincial military leaders was natural; they were all under attack, probably from the same quarter, and they had a common stake in maintaining a modicum of order in China. Much of Chinese political history in the past four years has revolved around the split that developed in 1967, and the greatest winner in the ensuing struggle has been Chou himself.

18. His victory is not unalloyed, however. The ejection of Lin Piao's associates in the central military structure also entailed the removal of the chief of staff, an important figure with close ties to the provincial military leaders and to Chou himself. Several lesser members of the Cultural Revolution Group remain active, including Mao's wife,

-7-

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

who now formally ranks just after Chou himself in the party hierarchy. There can be little doubt that Chou must look over his shoulder at these figures as he executes policy, both domestic and foreign. But his own network of allies is formidable. The ranking military man in China, Yen Chien-ying, has been an associate of Chou since the early 1920s and has been a negotiating partner since at least the early 1940s. Chou retains ties of long standing to many important army figures; he was an instructor at the famous Whampoa Academy where many of China's military leaders were first trained and until the mid-1930s acted as political commissar for the Communist military forces. He controls the government bureaucracy and is in charge of rebuilding the party machinery, where his patronage powers will prove very useful. Moreover, because he is widely trusted, he can command considerable loyalty up and down the system.

19. The one question mark is his relationship to Mao. The Chairman has enthusiastically endorsed the purge of Chou's enemies and has emphatically set his imprimatur on the new line toward the United States. He and Chou may have agreed that the army needed curbing last autumn--Mao because the more conservative (and predominant) military elements showed obvious doubts about the wisdom of the Cultural Revolution, Chou because the overwhelming role of the army in Chinese public life violated organizational norms as he understood them. But the fact remains that Mao must have been aware of the attempt to purge Chou in 1967, and there is no evidence that he intervened decisively to defend him. Moreover, Chou has in effect been involved in a four-year quarrel with Mao's designated successor, with Mao's long-time secretary and confidant, and with Mao's wife. Mao's sense of realism, of what the "traffic can bear," seems now to have led him to heed Chou's advice in both domestic and foreign matters, but it is quite possible that Chou appreciates that Mao could turn on him. In the worst of conflicts since 1935, however, Chou has consistently displayed personal loyalty to Mao, whatever their policy differences, and this may continue to stand him in good stead.

-3-

SECRET

25X1

**Page Denied**